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AUTHOR Adams, Kathrynn A.; Davis, Liane V.
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ABSTRACT

Although mothers remain the primary caretakers of children, recent empirical evidence supports the notion that fathers are important in the lives of even very young children. This study examined relationships between fathers' and mothers' attitudes toward childrearing (as measured by the Parent Attitude Research Instrument), their beliefs about internal and external factors which they perceive to be important to be a successful father or mother and the cognitive, social, and sex role development of their preschool children. Fathers' and mothers' authoritarianism and warmth and internal and external orientations were consistently and yet differently related to the development of their sons and daughters. These results imply that the father's role as a caretaker in contemporary middle-class families is not redundant with the mother's role, but is truly different. (Author)

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The Father's Perception of his Role and the Child's Development

Kathrynn A. Adams
Wake Forest University

Liane V. Davis
S.U.N.Y.-Albany

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The Father's Perception of his Role and the Child's Development

Mothers have been and remain the primary caretakers in children's lives. One study of 6-24 month old children revealed that 75% of the fathers had no regular childcare responsibilities, while 43% admitted to never having changed their child's diapers (Kotelchuck, 1976). This sparsity of physical interaction between father and child has been an important determining factor in personality theorists' assumption that fathers as childrearers were uninfluential, at least until middle childhood. Recent trends, however, have brought this belief into contention. The Women's Movement has led many to question whether women have some unique ability and therefore, of necessity, need to continue bearing major childcare responsibility. Research, prompted in part by the increased number of working mothers, has shown that the amount of time spent in childcare activities is unrelated to the more important quality of parent-child interaction (Lamb, 1976). Empirical evidence of recent years lends support to the growing recognition that fathers are important in the lives of even very young children. Although the type and quality of the father-child interaction may differ from that of the mother and child, fathers and infants do form active and intimate relationships (Biller, 1974; Kotelchuck, 1976; Lamb, 1976; Lamb and Lamb, 1976; Parke and O'Leary, 1975).

One of the most important aspects of the father-child relationship which has been studied is the quality of paternal nurturance and warmth. This has been found to be positively associated with the present and subsequent intellectual development of preschool boys (Baumrind, 1971; Jordan, Radin, and Epstein, 1975; Radin, 1972; 1973, 1976; Radin and Epstein, 1975), although the same relationship has not been reliably found between fathers and

daughters. Fathers, it seems, give their daughters mixed messages regarding intellectual competence. Sensing a conflict between instrumental competence and traditional sex role socialization, fathers tend to stress the latter at the expense of the former (Biller and Meredith, 1974; Lynn, 1974). The warmth of father-child interaction is not only related to intellectual achievement, then, it is also related to the development of traditional sex role behavior and these two are not independent of one another. Warm father-child relations foster masculinity in sons and, later on, foster femininity in daughters (Biller, 1969; Johnson, 1963; Mussen and Distler, 1960). Some investigators have found this effect to be stronger for sons than for daughters (Biller, 1969; Kaplar, 1970). Boys may be more likely to want to identify with fathers who are nurturant which may lead to quicker and more complete identification than may occur among boys with non-nurturant fathers. A close father-daughter relationship, on the other hand, may enhance the father's reinforcement of the girl's feminine behavior and so influence traditional sex role development in a less direct fashion. Thus one would expect a stronger relationship between father's warmth-son's masculinity than between father's warmth-daughter's femininity.

A second influential father variable which has received considerable attention is authoritarianism. Baumrind (1971) found that authoritarian attitudes were associated with extremely high or low competence among preschoolers. It has also been related to children's dependency behaviors (Donoghue, 1977) as dictatorial parents may restrict children's spontaneous and active exploration thereby reinforcing dependency while inhibiting mastery of their environment.

Although these results are helpful in understanding the impact of the father on his child, we still have only a limited view of the father's

attitudes toward or actual role in child rearing. Many early investigations relied either on wives' and/or children's reports of the father's attitudes and behaviors, or on observations made simultaneously of both parents in artificial settings. It has been noted that father-mother-child interactions may differ from father-child or mother-child interactions (Parke and O'Leary, 1975). Fathers and mothers, do however, form the primary social network for the developing infant (See Lewis and Weinraub (1976) on social network theory), and as such, their individual and interactive behaviors vis á vis their infant must be studied.

The present study is a beginning attempt to examine some of the relationships between fathers' and mothers' attitudes toward child-rearing, their beliefs about factors which they perceive to be important for being a good father or mother, and the cognitive, social and sex role development of their preschool children. Measures of parental warmth and authoritarianism were obtained from a shortened form of the Parental Attitude Research Instrument (Cross and Kawash, 1968). Consistent with previous research, it was expected that boys of warm, nonauthoritarian parents would manifest the highest intellectual achievement and social competence and boys of rejecting, authoritarian parents would show less overall competence. Among the girls, it was expected that warm, nonauthoritarian parents would encourage social competence, but the effects on intellectual achievement might be moderated by the mixed messages given by nurturant fathers. Since children can identify their own gender by their third year (Thompson, 1975), they may begin to pay more attention to and so be more influenced by their same sex parent. Therefore, fathers' and mothers' attitudes were expected to be more strongly related to the development of the same sex child.

This study was concerned with children's knowledge of stereotypic sex roles rather than their sex role preference. Preschool boys are more

sex-typed and avoid cross-sex games more than girls (Ross, 1971; Wolf, 1973). They also show a strong preference for their father in play activities by the age of two while girls show no preference for either parent until the age of four (Lynn and Cross, 1974). Thus young boys may have a clearer differentiation of "male" and "female" behaviors than their female counterparts. Additionally, we know that fathers are more concerned than mothers with the traditional sex role development of their children, especially their sons (Lansky, 1967). If boys do identify more completely and at an earlier age with warm, nurturant fathers, we should expect paternal warmth to correlate positively with sons' knowledge of sex role stereotypes. Since warm fathers encourage traditional feminine behavior in their daughters, we might also expect paternal warmth to be positively associated with daughters' knowledge of sex role stereotypes, although to a lesser degree.

Contemporary psychological literature abounds with articles on individuals' attributions for events. One division which has proved useful in describing attributions concerns internal-external factors. Individuals may view their own knowledge, or efforts as responsible for success in a task (internal attributions) or they may attribute such success to luck or task difficulty (external attributions), factors over which they have little control. No one has yet applied this theoretical framework to parenting, a role in which the majority of males and females participate. The importance which parents attribute to internal factors should be positively related, while the strength of external attributions should be negatively related, to competence in preschoolers. The former group, believing that their own actions are responsible for their child's development should attempt to structure a stimulating environment which encourages their child's mastery

in tasks. Parents who believe that factors external to themselves are the primary determinants of their children's development should make few attempts to encourage their offspring's development and so produce less competent children. As with attitudes, the attributions of parents should be more strongly related to their same-sex child's performance.

Method

Subjects

Twenty-three female and 17 male white children and their parents were recruited from six nursery schools in a Southern city. Letters requesting participation were sent to parents of 95 children selected from rosters of the nursery schools on the basis of age (between the ages of four and five), race (Caucasian only), and parental marital status (intact families only). Parents of 50 children (52.6%) agreed to allow their children and themselves to participate in the study. Of these, 40(80%) completed all the necessary material. The average father (mother) was 31.89 (29.54) years of age and had completed 14.83 (14.31) years of school.

Materials

Two questionnaires were prepared for the parents. The first was a short form of the Parental Attitude Research Instrument revised by Cross and Kawash (1968) from the original PARI (Schaefer and Bell, 1958). The shortened form assesses authoritarianism and warmth. The second instrument was an attribution questionnaire designed to assess perceived causes for success at child-rearing and was adapted from research reported by Falbo and Beck (in press). Children were administered the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test and the Sex Stereotype Measure (SSMII) (Williams, Bennett, and Best, 1975). Teachers completed the California Preschool Social Competency Scale (CPSC) for each child.

Procedure

Children were individually tested at their schools by one of three female examiners. Each child was seen for two sessions lasting 10-15 minutes. During the first session the PPVT was administered; during the second session which took place 2-4 days later, the SSMII was administered. The attribution scale and the PARI were sent home to parents with separate forms for mother and father and instructions to complete them individually. Teachers completed the CPSC during their free time.

Results

The intelligence, social competence, and sex stereotype measures of each child provide a global picture of the preschooler's development to which parental attitudes and attributions were related. As many investigations have found that fathers and mothers influence their children's development differentially by sex, separate analyses were calculated for boys and girls.

Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations for the children on their three assessment measures. The sample scored slightly above average on the PPVT and on the CPSC as might be expected of children from middle to upper-middle class homes. Males ($\bar{X}$=113.88) scored significantly higher than females ($\bar{X}$=106.70) on the PPVT, $t(38)=2.52$, $p < .05$, but there was no sex difference on the CPSC, $t(38)=.81$, $p > .10$.

Insert Table 1 about here

The SSMII measured children's knowledge of male and female stereotypes. Both boys and girls scored significantly higher than chance (a score of 8 on the masculine or feminine scales and 16 on the total score) on the masculine stereotype ($t_{male}(15)=1.69$, $p < .10$; $t_{female}(21)=20.4$, $p < .05$)

and on the total stereotype ($t_{male}(15)=1.80$, $p < .05$; $t_{female}(21)=4.12$, $p < .01$). On the feminine stereotype, however, only the girls scored significantly higher than chance ($t(21)=2.02$, $p < .05$).

Table 2 contains the means and standard deviations of parents on the attitudinal and attributional measures. Internal and external scales were derived by separating the 8 items which appeared predominantly internal (i.e., determination, superior knowledge) from the 12 which appeared predominantly external (i.e., good luck, lack of interference from others). Scores for the internal items (which ranged from 0-5) were summed (providing a total possible internal score of 40) and scores for the external items were summed (providing a total possible external score of 60).

Insert Table 2 about here

Four 2 x 2 (Sex of Parent x Sex of Child) analyses of variance were performed using nonauthoritarianism, warmth, internal and external scores as dependent variables. None of the analyses showed significant main effects or interactions, suggesting that parents responded similarly to the PARI and to the attributional questionnaire regardless of the sex of their child or their own sex. Two correlation matrices were computed using daughters' and sons' child development measures (IQ, social competency, sex role stereotype) and the parental measures (nonauthoritarianism, warmth, internality, externality).

Child-child Measures

For both girls and boys, knowledge of female and male stereotypes were negatively associated ($r_{females}(21)=-.54$, $p < .01$; $r_{males}(15)=-.79$, $p < .01$) and knowledge of male stereotypes was positively associated with the total SSMII ($r_{female}(21)=.55$, $p < .01$; $r_{male}(15)=.67$; $p < .01$). Knowledge of female stereotypes was unrelated to boys' total SSMII score ($r(15)=.07$), but

marginally associated with girls' total SSMII score ($r(21)=.40$, $p < .10$). Thus, for boys, it was their knowledge of male stereotypes alone which contributed consistently to their total SSMII scores, while for girls, knowledge of both stereotypes determined their total scores. The relationship of social competency and IQ with other variables differed by sex of child. Girls' CPSC scores failed to correlate with any of their other developmental measures, while boys' social competency was negatively associated with their male ($r(15)=-.49$, $p < .05$) and total ($r(15)=-.42$, $p < .10$) stereotype scores. The more socially adept a boy, the less he was likely to know about sex role stereotypes. The relationship between girls' IQ and female SSMII scores tended toward significance ($r(21)=.39$, $p < .10$), suggesting that more intelligent girls know more about female stereotypes. Boys IQs failed to correlate with any of their other scores.

Father-child Relationships

The results suggest that mothers' and fathers' attitudes are related in different ways to their children's development. As has been previously found, paternal warmth tended to correlate positively with sons' IQ ($r(15)=.47$, $p < .10$) but not with daughters' ($r(21)=-.28$). Fathers' nonauthoritarianism was positively associated with both sons' total SSMII score ($r(15)=.61$, $p < .01$) and with their sons' knowledge of male stereotypes ($r(15)=.43$, $p < .10$). Their internality was associated with daughters' knowledge of female ($r(21)=.41$, $p < .05$) and total stereotypes ($r(21)=.47$, $p < .05$).

Mother-child Relationships

The external orientation of mothers appears to be an important factor since it related to three of the daughters' and two of the sons' developmental measures. Maternal externality tended to be associated with decreased IQ for daughters ($r(21)=.36$, $p < .10$). It correlated with daughters' and sons' total SSMII scores, albeit in opposite ways ($r_{female}(21)=.41$, $p < .05$; $r_{male}(15)=-.74$,

$p < .01$). The more a mother believed that events outside her control influenced her ability to be a good parent, the less her son knew about stereotypes. Preschool daughters, however, appear to have more knowledge about sex roles if their mothers have higher externality scores. Maternal externality was also significantly associated with children's social competency, but again the direction was a function of the child's sex ($r_{female}(21)=-.42$, $p < .05$; $r_{male}(15)=.50$, $p < .05$). Socially adept boys were likely to have less externally oriented mothers, while socially adept girls were likely to have more externally oriented mothers. While externality was the only maternal variable related to sons' behavior, mothers' nonauthoritarianism correlated with the total SSMII score of daughters ($r(21)=-.46$, $p < .05$).

Parent-parent Relationships

A correlation matrix using the four parental measures was generated. These variables were interrelated within a parent as well as between parents. Parents' internality and externality were significantly correlated ($r_{mother}(38)=.42$, $p < .01$; $r_{father}(38)=.37$, $p < .05$). Thus, success in child rearing was seen as determined either by many factors, both external and internal, or by few factors. Mothers' and fathers' attitudes toward childrearing were very similar. Both nonauthoritarianism and warmth of spouses were positively associated ($r_{nonauth}(38)=.43$, $p < .01$; $r_{warmth}(38)=.31$, $p < .10$). As fathers' internal orientation increased, so did their warmth ($r(38)=.39$, $p < .05$) and their spouses warmth $r(38)=.29$, $p < .10$). Paternal nonauthoritarianism was negatively associated with maternal externality ($r(38)=-.44$, $p < .01$). Finally, as mothers' nonauthoritarianism increased, her warmth tended to decrease ($r(38)=-.29$, $p < .10$).

Discussion

The results of this initial attempt to examine relationships between

parents' attitudes toward childrearing and the development of their children appear consistent with previous research as well as provide some new dimensions to our presently sketchy knowledge of the family network.

Sex differences are already apparent among these preschoolers. Although it is usually assumed that girls demonstrate superior verbal ability, boys in this sample scored significantly higher than girls on the PPVT. This is additional support for Maccoby and Jacklin's (1974) observation that consistent female superiority in verbal skills is not found until middle childhood.

The sex differences in knowledge of sex roles was somewhat surprising but in retrospect, easily explained. Both boys and girls know the stereotypic male role, the one traditionally considered more important in our society, but only girls know very much about the female role. Since males are more sex-typed than females by age 4 and parents allow them less deviancy in sex appropriate behaviors, boys may learn the characteristics of the male role without defining the female role. For girls, two forces may explain their earlier awareness of both male and female appropriate behaviors. First, they are permitted to manifest both masculine and feminine behaviors, although generally receiving more reinforcement for feminine conduct. Thus, they become familiar with the behaviors of both sexes, while reinforcement helps them to begin to differentiate those considered appropriate for their own sex. Second, girls' early awareness of sex role stereotypes may indicate that even by this early age girls have been socialized to be more attentive and sensitive to the behaviors of others. This finding does not contradict evidence showing females to be less sex stereotyped in their behaviors and preferences as here we were concerned only with the children's knowledge of stereotyped behaviors.

The negative correlation between knowledge of male and female stereotypes for boys and girls is similarly not an inexplicable finding. Learning the

exact behaviors traditionally associated with both sexes is a much more difficult task than learning one's own gender and the behaviors one is expected to exhibit. Because of this children may tend to define one sex role at a time. That learning of sex role stereotypes is a difficult task receives support from the finding that girls' knowledge of the female role tended to correlate with their IQ. It may be that the more intelligent a girl, the more sensitive she is to reinforcement cues and the more likely she will be to differentiate male and female roles at an early age.

To explain why boys' knowledge of male and total stereotypes was negatively related to their social competency it is necessary to understand the behaviors included in the two scales. The male stereotype includes behaviors such as aggressiveness, independence, messiness, cruelty. Boys who are more familiar with this stereotype may behave in a more "masculine" manner. The CPSC scale, however, considers social maturity to be reflected in behaviors such verbal (but not physical) interaction, asking permission, sharing, helping others, and seeking help, behaviors which may be antithetical to the stereotypic male role. Pleck (1975) has noted that standardized measures of masculinity do not necessarily imply healthy adjustment; our data suggest this may be true of preschoolers.

This research was conducted primarily to study parent-child relationships. As predicted, fathers' attitudes were more strongly related to their sons' than to their daughters' development. In fact, paternal attitudes did not correlate with any of their daughters' measures. Consistent with previous studies, warm fathers did tend to have more intelligent sons. In addition, nonauthoritarian fathers had sons with more knowledge of appropriate masculine behaviors. These fathers may provide a less rigid and aloof model for their sons than authoritarian fathers and so simultaneously encourage and teach masculine behaviors through the quality of their relationship. Authoritarian fathers who are just

as concerned with their sons' sex role development may be too distant for their sons to readily learn from or may even provide a negative model. These sons may learn to passively follow rules rather than actively acquire knowledge about sex roles or they may rebel and acquire neither the knowledge nor the behavior of the traditional male.

The only maternal PARI item to relate to children's development was nonauthoritarianism which was negatively correlated with daughters' total sex role stereotype. Mothers in general are not as concerned as fathers with the sex role development of their children. Nonauthoritarian mothers may be less likely than authoritarian mothers to set restrictions on their daughters' behavior, freely allowing feminine and masculine behaviors. Thus their preschool daughters acquire less knowledge about which behaviors are specific to each sex.

The internal-external orientation of fathers was found to be important only for daughters' sex role development. More internally-oriented fathers tended to have daughters who knew more about sex roles, especially the feminine one. Fathers who believe that their own actions are important for their child's development may be more involved in childrearing and this increased activity may lead to more consistent reinforcement of sex appropriate behaviors for their daughters. Less internally-oriented fathers may expect the mother or outside forces to perform this task. This interpretation is consistent with prior research showing fathers' warmth to be correlated with daughters' femininity. Our data suggest that it is not only the warmth of the father but his sense of personal responsibility toward childrearing which positively correlates with a more sex-stereotyped daughter. Paternal orientation may be unimportant for sons since fathers are generally very concerned with their sons' masculinity and would therefore play an important role regardless or their orientation.

As we have seen, mothers' externality appears to be the most influential variable for children of both sexes. External mothers have daughters with lower IQs who are less socially competent and more aware of sex role stereotypes. These mothers assume that sources other than themselves produce well-adjusted and competent children and may make less attempt to provide a stimulating environment for their daughters' intellectual development or to encourage them to take responsibility in interactions with others. They may also provide a model which conveys that there is little women can do to control their own lives, and so communicate to their daughters a need to be sensitive to outside factors such as people. If this were true, one might expect such children not only to develop an earlier idea of traditional sex roles but to also become more dependent upon other people resulting in decreased social maturity. The only problem with this explanation is that external mothers were also more likely to believe in the importance of internal factors: in other words, they were more likely to believe that everything was important in being a successful parent. That there were no significant correlations between mothers' internality and child variables suggests, however, that while mothers may rate internal factors as important, it may be their belief in the external factors which is communicated and affects the behavior of their daughters.

Why do external mothers have daughters who are more familiar and sons who are less familiar with stereotypes? Such mothers may make little effort to teach their children sex roles. However, this may be a more complex relationship. Maternal externality and paternal nonauthoritarianism were negatively correlated; maternal externality and sons' sex role stereotypes were negatively correlated; paternal nonauthoritarianism and sons' sex role stereotypes were positively correlated. It is therefore possible that authoritarian fathers simultaneously cause mothers to focus on the importance of factors outside their

control (or choose as wives women who are externally oriented) and fail to provide a model which their male children choose to emulate.

The positive relationship between maternal externality and sons' social competency seems puzzling until one remembers the negative relationship between social competency and knowledge of sex roles. If external mothers produce sons who are less familiar with the masculine role, they may tend to exhibit less masculine behavior and thus score higher on the CPSC. Mothers lack of encouragement of sons' sex role development may increase sons' proficiency at social skills as measured by the CPSC. Another possibility is that external mothers convey similar messages to their daughters and sons vis á vis the importance of being concerned about other people in their environment albeit with opposite effects. For girls, it may cause increased dependency and decrease the social compentency score; for boys, an increased awareness of others may make them more socially concerned thereby increasing their scores on the CPSC. What is apparent is that the externally oriented mother deserves further scrutiny as she seems to provide a different model, or have a different influence on male and female children.

What can we say about the relationship between the child's mother and father in terms of their childrearing attitudes? Our data suggest that parents share similar attitudes about warmth and authoritarianism. We do not know if this similarity develops over the years of childrearing or whether this was a factor which helped bring the couple together. For whatever reason, it appears that parents agree on these basics. Attention should next be focused on whether these similar attitudes are carried out into similar behaviors toward children or whether despite these similarities parents behave differently toward their children.

The relationship between parents' internality and externality suggests that they view childrearing as a complex or a simple task involving either

many or only a few factors. All claimed that internal and external factors contributed to parenting, the difference was more one of how many rather than what kind of factors were important. We have no evidence that the attributional orientations of husbands and wives were related to one another, as we had found with the PARI. This is not surprising as parents would be far more likely to have discussed or been manifestly aware of the kinds of issues raised in the PARI questionnaire than in the attribution questionnaire. As there is increasing emphasis on paternal responsibility for childrearing, we might expect more discussion about such attributional issues and increased agreement between parents.

Conclusions

In intact homes mothers' and fathers' attitudes and orientations appear to be consistently, and yet differently, related to the development of their preschool sons and daughters. Both parents are important to the healthy adjustment of children as each one influences different aspects of the child's development. A correlational study such as this has obvious limitations, but does suggest numerous directions for future research. Specifically, the family network needs to be observed in natural settings and the interaction compared with the expressed attitudes of parents to discover whether, as our study suggests, father's role as caretaker is not redundant with mother's role but is truly different, especially in the average middle-class family.

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Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Children's Measures

	Boys		Girls	
	$\bar{X}$	s	$\bar{X}$	s
PPVT	113.88	9.01	106.70	8.86
SSM male	9.29	3.16	8.91	2.15
SSM female	7.70	2.34	8.78	1.85
SSM total	17.00	2.29	17.65	1.92
CPSC (percentile)	55.76	28.04	55.43	21.03

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Parental Scores

	Mothers				Fathers			
	Sons		Daughters		Sons		Daughters	
	$\bar{X}$	s	$\bar{X}$	s	$\bar{X}$	s	$\bar{X}$	s
Nonauthoritarianism	97.24	7.50	98.96	7.79	96.76	10.40	97.52	6.77
Warmth	22.47	3.86	23.26	4.64	24.47	3.10	23.83	4.16
Internality	31.65	3.35	30.74	4.11	31.00	5.07	31.22	3.13
Externality	41.65	6.93	38.70	5.96	39.65	7.71	40.22	5.68